

BOOK REVIEW

Charles T. Tart. *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together*.

Reviewed by Matthew Fike, PhD

As its subtitle indicates, the focused topic in Charles T. Tart's newest book, *The End of Materialism*, is the relationship between science and spirituality. Where proponents of scientism and materialism have assumed mutual exclusivity, Tart asserts that science provides evidence, though not definitive proof, that the mind is greater than the brain and that a human being is more than a "meat-based computer that will soon die." That is, "rigorously using the same scientific method, essential science, [which] has led to such great success in understanding and engineering the material world, leads us to a picture of humans having a nonmaterial, spiritual aspect to our reality." Mind connects with both brain and spirit; and mind, brain, and body are intricately "enmeshed." Tart thus challenges debunkers who believe that seeing ourselves as more than physical bodies means that we are "'irrational,' 'unscientific,' or 'crazy.'"

The "essential science" that lies at the heart of Tart's approach is a fourfold process: to observe reality, to reflect on what one observes and to devise theories, to improve and expand those theories, and to use them to predict what will happen under different conditions. Simply put, it is "refined common sense." "Used correctly, science can be an open-ended, error-correcting, personal-growth system of great power." The book's huge emphasis on evidential data makes it scientific in this highly positive sense, though the author insists that it "is not a scientific book per se" because it reflects his "full humanity and complexity: scientific, humanistic, spiritual, skeptical but open—and personal, when that helps illustrate points." It is as "a scientist and a personal seeker" (author's emphasis) that Tart makes his case for a dualistic view that includes both matter and spirit.

In his emphasis on scientific data, Tart is in full accord with Dean Radin whose books, *The Conscious Universe* and *Entangled Minds* (for a review of the latter see TMI Focus 29.1-2), [See: *Topics/Reviews/Book Reviews*] he warmly praises at four points in the text. Radin's objective, however, differs from Tart's. Whereas *Entangled Minds* uses scientific studies to show that paranormal phenomena are real, *The End of Materialism* asserts that the quantum entanglement to which Radin attributes psi phenomena is an aspect of the physical universe. Even consciousness, in Tart's view, is considered to be an aspect of the physical universe; and in this regard, he might have engaged meaningfully with Thomas Campbell's *My Big TOE* trilogy (see review in TMI Focus 31.3-4) [See: *Topics/Reviews/Book Reviews*]. Radin uses entanglement to argue for the existence of Einstein's "spooky action at a distance"; and

Campbell uses the concept of *consciousness* to offer a theoretical explanation of how psi works and how creation—physical and nonphysical—is organized. Tart combines aspects of both authors' strategies by using experimental evidence to show that psi is real, claiming that future research should focus on how psi works, and arguing that the evidential data suggest that the mind is greater than the brain.

In executing this strategy, the author follows a logical, if somewhat repetitious, organization. The volume begins with Richard Maurice Bucke's third-person account of his own experience of Cosmic Consciousness. The problem is then stated with an obligatory reference to Bertrand Russell's "philosophy of total materialism." Tart reviews essential science, which applies reason to experience; and then he distinguishes between a properly skeptical scientific approach and an improperly pseudoskeptical scientific approach, the latter being a false belief system or "neurotic defense" mechanism. At this point, a long list identifies the intellectual traps to which humans are prone. The main part of the text follows: the "big five" are discussed, that is, the psi phenomena whose "veridical" nature (veracity) science has validated; these are telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and psychic healing. Tart then discusses the "many maybes": postcognition, OBE, NDE, postmortem survival, after-death communication (ADC), mediumship, and reincarnation. The big five are to scientific experiment as the many maybes are to personal anecdote, though this is more a general trend than an ironclad distinction. After a summary of the foregoing material, Tart considers what a more spirit-centered life would look like and caps the body off by returning to Bucke's experience. Four appendices follow: a list of books on parapsychology; helpful websites; Tart's TASTE website (The Archive of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences); and a précis on transpersonal psychology.

A closer look at Tart's terminology should amplify the project just outlined. He uses the word "spiritual" in reference to "a realm of values, experiences, realities, and insights that goes beyond the ordinary material world," that is, "another order of reality involving its own kind of possible entities and their decisions, a spiritual order that, to an unknown extent, affects our ordinary material reality." Experience, authority, reason, and revelation are the four ways of gaining knowledge about reality, whether that reality be physical or *spiritual*; but any of them can become an intellectual trap. Tart is especially critical of scientism, "a rigidified and dogmatic corruption of science," of pseudoskepticism (the realm of "debunkers, missionaries, [and] advocates"), and of the Law of Universal Retrospective Rationalization (our post facto attempt to attribute psi phenomena to materialistic causes). Although such criticisms and his assertion of a synergy of science and spirituality are on track, the author creates a false dichotomy between spirituality and religion. Yes, there is a difference between "primary, life-changing experiences of the spiritual versus institutionalized, socialized doctrines and practices"; but as his various positive statements about prayer indicate, it is simply not correct to overlook the fact that religion can sometimes be conducive to spirituality despite its institutional framework.

TMI readers will find Tart's material on OBE to be among the most interesting sections of *The End of Materialism*; indeed he devotes eleven pages to Monroe's experiences and the experiments that Tart performed on him in a laboratory setting. The author reminds readers in a note of the role that he played in helping Monroe publish *Journeys Out of the Body*, though the first appendix lists only *Far Journeys* and *Ultimate Journey*. It was Tart who in a 1968 publication coined the acronym "OOBE," but he was later informed that it should have been "OBE" because "of" does not merit a letter. Of greater relevance to the Institute are Tart's connection between alpha and theta waves and OBE, his mention that Hemi-Sync® reinforces theta waves, and his list of conclusions about what an OBE might be. Perhaps some part of the mind may be genuinely bilocated, or perhaps an OBE merely simulates such a condition. Between these extremes, an OBE may be a simulated bilocation enhanced by ESP. Maybe a person is really out, but perception is distorted as in a dream. Or perhaps being in bodies is the simulation, whereas being out is our natural state. Tart does not know for sure and calls the interpretation of OBE "a messy situation."

In Tart's view, since OBE and the other psi phenomena that he discusses "link the transpersonal and the physical," the case for "a spirituality anchored in scientific facts" that he advances in *The End of Materialism* means that what I consider to be "ME!" is a simulation or point of view rather than my entire reality. Embracing this position has the potential, certainly, to enhance the importance of life and to lessen the depression and grief related to death. As Tart's Western Creed exercise reveals, however, it is difficult for Western persons to embrace the transpersonal, which is why they/we struggle to learn the meditative practice necessary to achieve Cosmic Consciousness. The notion that mind is greater than brain also has implications for research: if there ARE spiritual beings, are their "desires and qualities . . . part of our experiment also?" In general, the multiple factors involved in psi experiments make conclusions about spirituality tentative by necessity. Nevertheless, Tart plans to forge ahead. In *The End of Materialism*, he provides evidence that psi is real and argues that the "big five" and the "many maybes" point to our spiritual nature. Starting with these notions, which TMI readers take for granted, he now plans to take the argument a step further: "With this book as a basis, I hope to later write another one sharing some of the things I've explored about actually practicing a spiritual life in modern times." Tart's next work should be of greater interest to TMI readers because its purpose will be to discuss the application, rather than to argue for the existence, of spirituality. We will await his further insights with eager anticipation.

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